

## How Should Boards Respond to the Report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education?

I hope they recognize the incredible value it places on the institutions they govern. For generations, a college education has meant the difference between a life lived on the edge of promise and one lived in the full embrace of the American Dream. A system so intrinsically linked to the future success of our children and our nation should be one of our highest priorities. I encourage all presidents and boards to use this report as a tool for self-reflection, strategic planning, and decision making.

*What are the report's most challenging recommendations?*

Its focus on the nation's need for postsecondary learning, research, and innovation. It singles out no one institution or sector but focuses on priorities to which all of our institutions should be committed.

*What immediate actions would you like higher education to take?*

I would like presidents, governing boards, and state policymakers to develop, under each broad priority—access, affordability, and accountability—an action plan with a short list of things that can be started immediately.

They can ask themselves what they are doing to make sure high school students have the skills they need to enroll in college. Their Web sites can clearly state what the average family pays in net tuition. Or better yet, clearly state what families at different income levels pay. They

can evaluate what their college is doing to partner with their state and the federal government to offer low-income students and families a commitment of affordability.

In the area of accountability, I hope more boards will look at the example of the University of Texas, the South Dakota Board of Regents, or the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. These systems have clear goals for performance, which include learning outcomes, and they regularly report institutional progress to the legislature and the public.

*How are you planning on working with governors, legislatures, and the business community?*

This spring, I'll convene a summit and bring these sectors together to discuss the recommendations, our progress, and specific responsibilities going forward.

*What are your next steps with Congress, and how will the Education Department be involved in implementing the recommendations?*

We have already begun a dialogue with Congress. In January, the president will release his 2008 budget, with funding requests to implement my action plan. With the Higher Education Act (HEA) being extended until next June, I am optimistic Congress will find this report a resource when it reauthorizes HEA.

At the department, the Office of the Under Secretary will oversee

implementation. The Federal Student Aid office will be working on simplifying the financial-aid application. The Office of Postsecondary Education is reviewing how accreditation can place more emphasis on outcomes. And the Office of Vocational and Adult Education is realigning its research in adult literacy to make sure we get evidence-based models to our community colleges.

*The commission calls for more federal aid for low-income students and greater investments in research. Can we expect more federal funding?*

Since 2001, President Bush has increased funding to the federal student-aid programs every year. This has resulted in nearly \$26 billion more in funding, with an additional 1.9 million students receiving federal aid. But it's important we also focus on the other recommendations just as critically. We need to keep college costs from rising so much faster than every other part of the economy.

*Where does the conversation go from here?*

With 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs requiring some postsecondary education, we must ensure that every citizen who wants to pursue a college degree is able to. The commission recommendations are a strong foundation, but we can't just stop at conversation. All of us who value higher education must commit to the necessary changes to ensure that we remain the finest in the world.